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NORMAN RICHARDSON

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# The Doom of the Indomitable

(Continued from page 12.)

the panic-stricken Fleet, firing her big guns incessantly, and finally opening out with her smaller cannon. In war, success is supposed to excuse everything, and history records how brilliantly successful was the daring feat of Lord Harry Willoughby, but more cautious naval tacticians hold that Willoughby was unwise in risking his one ship as he did. If there had been a single Captain among the Icelanders who had not lost his head under the undoubtedly terrifying incidents by which the fight was opened, the result of the second battle off Hull might have been vastly different.

WILLOUGHBY did nothing by halves. He rushed in, across his own danger line, where a single sheel striking a cruiser filled with ammunition would have destroyed her with her own powder, whirled round his ship broadside on, and pounded the Icelandic Fleet into a mass of scrap iron. The action had ceased to be war, and had become simply demoniac slaughter, ruthless and incessant.

Several of the ships broke away, and made for the north. For half an hour it seemed that Willoughby would allow this shattered remnant to carry the tale of calamity to distant Iceland, but it was not so. He did not even take the trouble to pursue the fugitives, but lying there, as if at anchor, flung a shell far over the nearest ships, to strike their leader, now growing invisible on the horizon line. Three shots finished her, as they had finished the "Hekievik." Two shots destroyed the second ship, which was a couple of miles nearer to the "Indomitable," and then the remaining ironclads hoisted signals of surrender, turned, and crawled slowly back to the conqueror.

It was long before this that Lieutenant Horska, of the Icelandic navy, had got together the devoted little band which formed the crew of Submarine X5, a craft containing many of Lieutenant Horska's own inventions, upon which he had counted to make his name known to the world. The easy victories of the Icelandic Fleet had put the submarine question into the background. These dangerous sharks of the sea had not been needed, and Lieutenant Horska's ambition bid fair to be unrealized.

At the beginning of the contest with the "Indomitable," Lieutenant Horska had implored permission from his superior to take out his flotilla of submarines, but this request was not granted. Horska's superior officer went down in the "Hecla," and then this heroic young man took matters into his own hands. In the confusion that ensued, it had been found impossible to gather together enough experienced men to operate the submarine contingent, so Horska had to content himself with fitting out the X5 alone.

The coolness of this capable officer is shown by the fact that while preparations were being made he found time to write a brief account of what he intended to do. This account was found afterwards in his room ashore. At the time of writing he saw the "Indomitable" coming swiftly landward, apparently increasing in size, and the Lieutenant took time briefly to condemn such a dangerous move on the part of the enemy, breathing a hope that his own action may be so successful as to prove him in the right. The Lieutenant concluded by saying that what he intended to do was of such importance to all nations that he had determined, if possible, to write a hasty account of what took place while he was in action on the submarine, as it happened. This account he promised to wrap in an oilskin pouch, which would be found on his person if he did not return. It is from this narrative, written by Lieutenant Horska, that I summarize what oc-

curred, and I know of no greater tribute to the patriotism of those heroes who willingly lay down their lives in the submarine service of all countries, than the fact that one of them, aware of his doom, slowly and helplessly sinking to the bottom of the sea, should, in the green light that filtered through the waves, calmly write an account of what he had accomplished.

By the time everything was in order, the huge "Indomitable" lay broadside on, less than a mile from the shattered remains of the Icelandic Fleet, methodically pounding that remnant into tangled iron and steel. The X5 ran out at full speed on the surface, keeping wide of the confused ruin that was sinking atom by atom under the relentless punishment of the British cruiser, then, afraid of approaching nearer in plain sight, she dived, and made straight for that terrible engine of devastation.

AT this point the Lieutenant pauses in his account to record his own disappointment, and his admiration for British coolness in action, at finding the torpedo nets down, and everything in order, as if the "Indomitable" had been on inspection parade, instead of single-handed, fighting a fleet. The Lieutenant was experienced enough to know by the speed of the "Indomitable" in coming towards the land, that her nets were not then out, yet it was evident that the moment she came to a standstill they had been put in place, and now they formed an impenetrable wall between the submarine and the cruiser's hull. After circumnavigating the "Indomitable" he slowly sank deeper and deeper until clear of the nets, and then moved forward, directly underneath the huge ship. He had but one torpedo to fire, and if that was to serve its purpose he must take no chances. He could fire her one torpedo only straight ahead from the prow. (The alert Lieutenant here notes down several improvements which he recommends to future builders of submarines.) Long as was the "Indomitable," he dare not risk a glancing shot. There was not room for his boat to manoeuvre if he rose between the hull and the torpedo net.

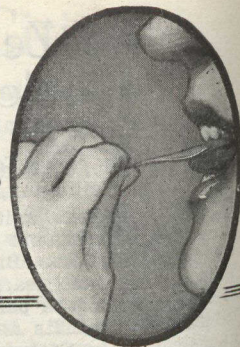
In this crisis he breathed a prayer for himself and his men, as he resolved deliberately to sacrifice their lives with his own, and I judge, from reading his account, that there was a momentary struggle of conscience before he determined that his men should go to their fate ignorant of it. He gave orders that the after-tanks should be filled with sea-water, that the torpedo boat might sink gradually at the stern.

Each man was at his post, clinging to footholds and handholds, as the stern slowly sank and sank, with the prow rising, and the hull coming nearer and nearer to the perpendicular. Lieutenant Horska records the warning of the second in command that if more water was let in, they could not recover a horizontal position. The Lieutenant curtly replied that the risk must be taken, and he was obeyed without protest or sign of mutiny, although every man knew he was doomed. Gradually, through the thick glasses that form the eyes in the prow of the boat, and through the green water above, the wavering darkness of the hull of the "Indomitable" came into sight, like a heavy, obscure thundercloud overhead.

There was deep silence in the submarine, which now stood on its tail, perpendicular in the water, while the Lieutenant himself pulled the string that liberated the torpedo, and eagerly watched it as it rose true, like a blunt-nosed fish, while the submarine herself was steadily sinking towards the bottom.

Here ends the Lieutenant's narrative, which was found where he had

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